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Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

Context and background

1. At the 2000 Millennium Summit, Heads of Government and representatives of 189 countries agreed on a vision for the new millennium. Member States committed to "spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty" and to "create an environment—at the national and global levels alike—which is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty" through the Millennium Declaration (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

2. The Millennium Development Goals are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. Since their endorsement by the General Assembly in 2001, the Goals have risen to the top of the global development agenda and are the common focus of priorities for the development community.

3. The Millennium Development Goals and their grounding in the Millennium Declaration come together to represent a holistic conception of development, a conception strongly linked to the human development paradigm that UNDP introduced in 1990. Specifically, human development recognizes that the aim of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long and healthy lives, have knowledge and a decent standard of living, and enjoy social and political freedoms. Only with these capabilities will people be able to make choices that allow them to live in a way they value.

4. The global community has reaffirmed the Goals at a series of international summits including the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, the 2005 World Summit in New York, the 2010 High-Level Meeting of the

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General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals and recent summits of the Group of 8. Over the years, these goals have transformed the development landscape. Governments, aid agencies and civil society organizations everywhere have reoriented their work around the Goals.

5. Since their inception, UNDP has played a key role at both country and global levels in helping achieve the Goals. UNDP support has encompassed three broad areas of work that have evolved over time:

(a) *Implementation*: Supporting countries in their efforts to develop and implement strategies and plans to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including helping countries to develop Goal-based national development strategies and investment plans, localize the Goals and efforts to help countries devise and implement acceleration plans for selected off-track Goals;

(b) *Monitoring*: As 'scorekeeper' for the Millennium Development Goals, assisting in monitoring progress at the country level;

(c) *Advocacy*: Evidence-based advocacy and analysis supporting specific outcomes in multilateral and global forums, including supporting efforts for resource mobilization.

6. The year 2015 is a defining moment in the Millennium Development Goal timeline, with countries focusing efforts towards accelerating progress while at the same time drawing lessons from their experience with the Goals to help shape the post-2015 development agenda and inform its implementation.

7. In 2014, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) carried out an evaluation with the aims to: (a) assess the results achieved by UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Goals; (b) identify the factors that have affected the contribution and performance of UNDP in supporting the achievement of the Goals (strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, which decisions, strategies and approaches have worked and which have not); and (c) provide strategic recommendations to inform the UNDP strategy in the post-2015 agenda.

8. The evaluation covered the period 2002-2014. The UNDP management response (contained in the annex) encompasses practical and time-bound key actions which build on ongoing work, and designates the parties responsible.

Overview of the methodology

9. UNDP management welcomes the evaluation as it provides useful recommendations and a forward-looking assessment drawn from the UNDP role in support of achieving the Millennium Development Goals to inform the UNDP strategy of support for the sustainable development goals emerging from the post-2015 agenda.

10. UNDP management recognizes that the methodology of the evaluation combines evaluative evidence and country studies. UNDP management also recognizes that the evaluation relied on multiple sources for data collection and mixed methods of analysis: validation and triangulation of evidence, including synthesis of evidence from prior global and regional evaluations (e.g., evaluations of the Millennium Campaign and the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund, the IEO series of evaluations of the global programme and of all regional programmes, and the IEO evaluation of the UNDP contribution to poverty reduction); semi-structured interviews; 11 country case studies with information on outcomes at country level; a review of national development strategies in 50 countries; a review of the guidance notes issued by UNDP on the Goals; and findings from a questionnaire survey.

11. The report has presented the analysis, findings and recommendations in a structured way. UNDP management notes that the evaluation was scoped to focus on the tools and approaches that UNDP used explicitly to support achievement of the Goals at the country level, emphasizing comprehensive support to all the Goals as a 'package'. However, UNDP management also notes that the exclusion of environment projects such as the Millennium Development Goal Carbon Facility, the Global Environment Facility and early recovery projects has certainly underestimated the contribution of UNDP to the overall achievement of the Goals at the country level. Furthermore, UNDP could have benefited from the lessons learned, evidence and guidance from a deeper assessment of Goal-related environment projects that could be used to inform the implementation of many of the proposed sustainable development goals.

Findings and conclusions

12. Overall, UNDP management welcomes some of the evaluation's findings as encouraging and useful. The evaluation notes that country programmes accounted for 80 percent of the UNDP budget to help Governments translate the Millennium Development Goals into pro-poor strategies, policies and programmes. There is recognition that: (a) the UNDP structure of regional bureaux and country offices was adequate to support the adaptation of the UNDP service offering and products to the diverse contexts in which it works; (b) UNDP has effectively ensured that the Goals were kept at the centre of the global, and in some cases, national, development debate; (c) UNDP monitoring work and support to statistical capacities have led to improvements in the quality of Goal-related data and contributed to a more 'data-friendly' environment; (d) 80 per cent of UNDP programme countries have adopted a subset or totality of the Goals in one or more of their development plans; (e) UNDP had a positive impact on development policy by helping to conceptualize the Goals at their onset and by mobilizing support for them; and (f) the various areas of the UNDP Millennium Development Goals programme were well designed, coherent and mutually reinforcing.

13. The management also welcomes the finding that UNDP has designed and rolled out a high-quality and well-timed set of diverse and complementary tools in support of Goal-related planning, monitoring and implementation. The management agrees that UNDP should strengthen the culture of generating and applying lessons learned.

14. UNDP management believes that some of the findings and the conclusions of the evaluation should be contextualized appropriately and should also be evidence-based. The absence of such contextualization, in terms of understanding the mandate and roles of UNDP at global, regional and country levels to support countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, can lead to incorrect findings and conclusions. UNDP management wishes to emphasize inter alia:

(a) On the roles of country reports versus the global progress report, it is important to note that the former are government reports intended to give voice to national actors domestically and externally, and as such should be distinguished from the global reporting mechanism of the United Nations system, which produces internationally comparable data based on standard definitions and where United Nations agencies have a definitive role. Note that the issue of discrepancies between national and international statistics is not in itself a measure of lack of quality or neutrality. There can be several legitimate reasons for these differences, including adjustments by international agencies to facilitate cross-country comparisons, different units or definitions. What matters is whether there is consistency over time in the country itself, and whether there is enough information to understand the differences as they arise;

(b) UNDP does not have a role in monitoring funding. There is a broader political context at the national/subnational levels within which UNDP operates and which actually sets the limits of its influence;

(c) On the development of Millennium Development Goal acceleration action plans, the resulting plan is endorsed by Governments, not by the United Nations. This is central to understanding how the plan is implemented in practice. The process also involves prioritization and a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach.

15. The management fully agrees with the evaluation's conclusion that UNDP is well positioned to approach the post-2015 era and help countries to achieve the sustainable development goals, but the emerging post-2015 agenda is significantly more comprehensive and complex than the Millennium Development Goal targets, and it will undoubtedly test the capacity of the United Nations to deliver as one. UNDP management also fully agrees that approaches similar to the Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Framework (MAF) and tools to support Goal-based national development strategies and localization will be increasingly required during the post-2015 period to ensure that global goals are adequately translated at the local level.

Annex. Key recommendations and management response

Evaluation recommendation 1:

UNDP should organize a last round of Millennium Development Goal country reports (end-line reports) in 2016-2017 to measure progress over the entire period of the Goals, establish baselines for the sustainable development goal era and identify lessons learned and good practices. This will allow UNDP to establish programmes on a strong empirical basis of what forms of support worked and did not work during the Millennium Development Goal era. UNDP should continue support to the 'unfinished Goals' even after 2015, by helping to focus development efforts on the poorest countries as well as pockets of deprivation within middle- and high-income countries.

Management response:

UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts and notes the need to capitalize on the experience of UNDP with the Goals, to recommit to closing the unfinished business and to facilitate a smooth transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals.

With UNDP support as part of its scorekeeping role, countries have reported regularly on progress. Over 450 national reports have been produced to date. Several reports were also produced at the subnational level. These generate the evidence base to inform policies within countries, while also helping to extract cross-country trends and empowering national delegations within regional and global forums. A concluding round of national reports is expected to be produced by some countries in 2015-2016 to present a final stocktaking, establish national baselines for the sustainable development goals/post-2015 development agenda and facilitate a smooth transition to implementation and monitoring for this successor development agenda. Headquarters, regional service centres and UNDP country offices are providing the technical support needed for the preparation of these reports, upon demand.

From the lessons learned and evidence base gathered from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the following actions are proposed to tackle the 'unfinished business':

- Bringing less visible Goals back in focus (e.g., gender equality and empowerment of women; universal access to reproductive health and family planning; access to sanitation);
- Sustaining gains already made and achieving remaining targets;
- Reaching the 'last mile' by extending Goal-related gains to the entire population;
- Using disaggregated data to monitor development achievements.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1. Based on demand, support a last round of country reports, in collaboration with the broader United Nations country team, with the aim to help countries estimate baselines for the sustainable development goals according to their current progress/status of the Millennium Development Goal indicators, as per data availability.	2015-2016	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS), regional bureaux and regional service centres		
1.2. Develop an online database of Millennium Development Goal indicators to provide the trend analysis per country based on the country report data, which would eventually support selected indicators for the sustainable development goals.	2015-2016	BPPS/Sustainable Development Cluster, in collaboration with regional bureaux and regional service centres		

1.3. Use the country reports Millennium Development Goal indicator database to generate an initial sustainable development goal observatory to monitor several indicators.	September 2015-2016	BPPS, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
Evaluation recommendation 2: **UNDP should continue to provide United Nations Member States and organizations with guidance and thought leadership at the level of the entire sustainable development goals agenda, on how to translate the post-2015 agenda to the national and subnational levels by establishing clear local priorities, while maintaining some degree of comprehensiveness and coherence with the global agenda.**				
Management response: UNDP welcomes this recommendation and agrees that 2015 provides an opportunity to leverage the experience and mandate of UNDP to successfully transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals. Products and services such as the MAF, guidelines for Goal monitoring at country level, the several tools to support the development of Goal-based national development strategies and the evidence base generated for successful negotiations and discussions related to the sustainable development goals can be suitably transformed to meet part of what is needed to guide the implementation of those goals beyond 2015. At the same time, the period leading up to the United Nations Summit to Adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be one of intense activity on the part of Member State and civil society, with a continuing demand for definitive analysis and evidence, until the global development agenda has been negotiated in detail. Knowledge about how implementation actually worked for the Millennium Development Goals in different countries and at the subnational level will help to inform these discussions and localization of the sustainable development goals. UNDP will also strengthen its existing collaboration with United Nations regional commissions to support actions towards the achievement and monitoring of the sustainable development goals at the regional level.				
2.1. Prepare a forward-looking, evidence-based report illustrating: (a) lessons learned and implications of the Millennium Development Goals for the post-2015 agenda implementation; (b) how and to what extent UNDP support to the Millennium Development Goal agenda can pave the way for the transition towards the sustainable development goals (e.g., localization, monitoring efforts and use of disaggregated data to take better account inequalities at subnational level, identification of implementation bottlenecks, including governance and capacity deficits, vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters); (c) relevance of the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals for the sustainable development goals, across different country typologies (e.g., including middle-income countries) and identification of lessons where similar 'relevance versus comparability' trade-offs can happen (e.g., process of nationalization of indicators and the need for relevant guidelines and methodologies, disaggregation of targets and indicators and relevant budget considerations); and (d) identify/map best practices implemented by countries in reaching the Millennium Development Goals, which have already been subject to South-South cooperation and that could help other countries to move forward on the unfinished business of the Goals and the future sustainable development goals.	September 2015	BPPS/Sustainable Development Cluster in coordination with respective regional service centres		

2.2. As a key part of the corporate strategy, evolve the MAF into a new sustainable development goal implementation tool including diagnostics to assess bottlenecks, costings and response strategies to address prioritized bottlenecks.	2015-2016	BPPS and regional service centres, in collaboration with regional bureaux		
2.3. In consultation with United Nations Development Group partners, design and launch the successor to the United Nations Millennium Campaign to serve as a campaigning and accountability movement to monitor implementation of the sustainable development goals from a people's perspective.	2015-2016	BPPS/United Nations Millennium Campaign		
2.4. Develop policy advocacy pieces focusing on the sustainable development goals and utilizing the lessons learned from the experience of the Millennium Development Goals.	2015	BPPS, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
2.5. Use mainstreaming of the Millennium Development Goals into national planning expertise and lessons learned to develop approaches and strategies for mainstreaming the sustainable development goals into national-/subnational-level planning.	2015-2016	BPPS, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
Evaluation recommendation 3: **While the post-2015 global agenda presents new challenges, the 'roles' UNDP played during the Millennium Development Goal era will remain useful and should be carried forward and enhanced for greater effectiveness**				
Management response: UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts, and notes that UNDP will take further actions to ensure that institutional memory is preserved and that lessons learned are well documented to help countries deliver better. UNDP will undertake a comprehensive stocktaking and mapping of the activities it has supported during the Millennium Development Goal period to effectively codify lessons learned on 'what has worked and what has not' so as to inform its knowledge products, tools and services offered in the post-2015 period.				
3.1. Continue to support the Millennium Development Goal acceleration reviews of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), including: a. Preparations for two additional sessions (in April and November 2015) including country cases on areas not previously covered; b. Monitor commitments undertaken by United Nations agencies and the World Bank under the scope of the initiative.	November 2015	BPPS/Sustainable Development Cluster, in collaboration with Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy and relevant regional bureaux		
3.2. Provide guidance on the future of the CEB Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Review Initiative, including: a. Elaborate a paper with clear recommendations on the lessons learned to promote better collaboration and synergy across the United Nations system, in line with the 'fit for purpose'	November 2015	BPPS/Sustainable Development Cluster		

recommendations of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development; b. In consultation with United Nations agencies and the World Bank, define a set of options for the post-2015 period, which builds on the CEB Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Review model.				
Evaluation recommendation 4: **UNDP support to countries and local governments in tailoring, planning and implementing the sustainable development goals at the national and local levels should take into systematic consideration key local factors known to influence the effectiveness of goal-based development planning, so as to minimize tokenism and focus assistance onto countries and regions with good prospects for implementing their sustainable development goal-based plans and policies.**				
Management response: UNDP takes note of this recommendation, but notes that action on the ground is primarily motivated by demand from countries. Over the transitional period 2015-2016, UNDP will continue to deliver on its mandate and commitments to support countries to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, while also transitioning to the implementation of the successor agenda. The UNDP role in supporting countries to achieve the Goals encompasses three pillars, which will provide good experience and evidence for transitioning to the sustainable development goals. Specifically, UNDP will adopt a forward-looking strategy comprising: 1. *Implementation:* Continue supporting countries in their efforts to develop and implement strategies and plans to achieve the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, including acceleration efforts and developing tools to localize the sustainable development goals; 2. *Monitoring:* As 'scorekeeper' for the Millennium Development Goals, assisting in monitoring progress at the country level and supporting countries to reflect on implications and pathways for achievement of the sustainable development goals. There is a need to embed prospective analysis and multisectoral perspectives in the next round of monitoring efforts; 3. *Advocacy and thought leadership:* Make available evidence-based advocacy and analysis supporting specific outcomes in multilateral and global forums.				
4.1. The UNDP policy framework on inclusive growth to address social exclusion and inequality.	2015	BPPS, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
4.2. Prepare a handbook on mainstreaming environment for poverty reduction and sustainable development.	August 2015	BPPS		
4.3. Re-launch UNDP support to countries to institutionalize and conduct costing, prioritization and identification of funding gaps and opportunities, and to strengthen management systems for financing sustainable development.	2015-2016	BPPS, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
4.4. Compile a menu of options for providing support to financial planning functions in central and sector ministries to plan, fund and implement sectoral strategies.	2015	BPPS and regional service centres		
Evaluation recommendation 5: **In order to support country programmes and learn from field-level experiences in implementation of the sustainable development goals, UNDP should establish and maintain over time a strong, stable cadre of dedicated advisors at headquarters and in regional hubs, able to support the regional bureaux and country offices' work related to the sustainable development goals over the long term, bring coherence to the overall effort and maintain some institutional memory. UNDP should document the varied approaches that will be used at the country level in a more systematic and objective way than has been the case so far. Resource mobilization**				

and the management of trust funds also need to be brought into a more coherent framework to support country-level activities.

Management response: The structural change at headquarters and regional levels is expected to produce a more functionally and geographically integrated organization to deliver on the current Strategic Plan. The restructuring is delivering an optimized regional presence with more advisory and support services moving to the regional level, to help country offices deliver quality results more efficiently, which will benefit the implementation of the sustainable development goals. With the establishment of the Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, all policy and programme support services are aggregated under a single bureau. At the same time, a new Crisis Response Unit was established in order to deploy staff with the relevant expertise on the ground more promptly and efficiently as crises develop. Combined with the rationalization of management support and a new accountability framework, the new structure will make UNDP a leaner and more transparent organization. UNDP will take further actions to ensure that institutional memory is preserved and that lessons learned are well documented to help countries deliver.				
No action required	--	--	--	--

* The implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.